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PREACHING THE GOSPEL a more effectual
Method of Salvation, than human Wis-
DOM and PHILOSOPHY.

A
S E R M O N
PREACHED AT THE
O R D I N A T I O N
OF THE REVEREND
Mr. THOMAS WRIGHT,

A T

Lewin's-Mead, Bristol, May 31. 1759.

Omnis doctrina et virtus philosophorum sine capite est,
quia Deum nesciunt, qui est virtutis ac doctrinae caput.
— In Dei agnitione et cultu rerum summa versatur.
In hoc spes omnis, ac salus hominis. Lactant. de ve-
ro cultu. Lib. 6.

By SAMUEL CHANDLER, D. D.
F. R. and A. S. S.

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Præsentatio the Gæstæ: nigræ et al
Method of Sublimation, and human Wit-
ness and Philosophy.

S E R M O N



Lowm's School, Bland, May 31, 1730.

On the doctrine of spiritus philosophicus, the nature and
properties thereof, and of various accidents
connected therewith, as also of the human
faculties, and the manner of their
operation, and the manner of their
influence on the human mind.

By SAMUEL CHAPMAN, D.D.
1730.



I COR. i. 21.

For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

***IN the seventeenth verse of this chapter the Apostle declares, that the great intention of his being sent by Christ to the Gentiles was, *to preach the Gospel* to them; *not with wisdom of words*; not with that studied eloquence, and those persuasive charms of oratory; or, not with that subtle and acute method of reasoning, which carries in it an air of wisdom, and without which nothing would relish amongst the wise and learned Greeks; *least the cross of Christ should be made of none effect*; i. e. least the doctrine he preached should appear to be a mere human speculation, to stand only upon the common foundation of human oratory and reasoning; to have no original or authority from God, nor any interposition of his power to confirm and establish it.

He well knew indeed, that the effect of his preaching the Gospel would be very different, according to the different dispositions and characters of those who heard it; that by some it would be treated with contempt, by others with an attention and regard, suitable to the great importance of the doctrine he taught; and that the consequences, with respect to both these sort of persons, would be answerable to the temper with which they received it. *The preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us who are saved it is the power of God.* And in the view of this glorious and beneficial effect of the doctrine of the cross, the Apostle cries out with triumph: * *Where is the wise man, where is the scribe, where is the disputer of this world?* What is the effect of human philosophy? What hath the world gained by the instructions of the Jewish Scribes, Rabbi's, and Doctors? What good hath been done by all the subtle, intricate, learned questions, that have been debated and disputed by the wisest men amongst Jews or Greeks? Where are the converts they have made to real knowledge, genuine religion, and the practice of righteousness? Even as to the very first article of all religion, the being of one God, the Creator, Preserver and Governor of the world, they have never been able to bring men to the acknowledgment and worship of him; for, as it follows in my text: § *After that, or since, in*
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the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. The wisdom of God here is that wisdom, understanding and skill, which God discovers in the frame of nature, and in all the various works and parts of which it consists. But by all these numerous and convincing discoveries of the wisdom of God in the creation, *the world, by wisdom, i. e. by human wisdom and philosophy, knew not God*; were never converted to the knowledge and worship of the one only living and true God. And therefore, because human wisdom had not in fact and experience ever answered this important purpose, *it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching*, by this method of preaching a crucified Saviour, which to the Greeks appeared foolishness, *to save them that believe*: which words will naturally lead us to consider the following things.

- I. The inefficacy of human wisdom and philosophy to bring mankind to knowledge and salvation.
- II. How it pleased God, by his own immediate interposition, to accomplish this benevolent design.
- III. The method which God made use of for this purpose.
- IV. The nature and causes of that severe censure, which the world passed on it. Of these in their order.

These

I. These words plainly intimate to us the inefficacy of human wisdom and philosophy to reform and save mankind. This sentiment is evidently conveyed to us in the words of the Apostle : *By the wisdom of God, viz. manifested in the works of creation, the world through wisdom, i. e. human wisdom and philosophy, knew not God; were not brought to form just and honourable sentiments of him, nor prevailed with § to glorify him as God; but worshiped and served the creature more than, or besides the creator, who is blessed for evermore.* Mankind indeed never were so far atheists, as absolutely to reject the belief of Deity; but still they may be truly said *to be without God in the world*, as they had too generally formed the most corrupt and unworthy notions of him, ascribed to him the passions and vices of men, and thought him, in the general, *altogether such an one as themselves*; a local, circumscribed, temporary, dependent being, subject himself to want, without perfection and rectitude of nature, destitute of all dignity of character, and every way unworthy to be placed at the head of the creation, and of the veneration and esteem, the affection, confidence, and trust of every truly rational Being. These were the popular sentiments of God. Many of the philosophers indeed had very different ones, and the more studious and thoughtful had formed much more excellent and worthy ideas of the divine nature and attributes, and
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treated with contempt the gods of the vulgar, and all the ceremonies of their worship as ridiculous and unprofitable superstitions. But still those gods continued to be the gods of the publick, and all the impieties and follies, that were practised in honour of them, maintained their ground, were held sacred and inviolable, and constituted the standing religion of the whole Gentile world.

It is true, that this ignorance of God, and the reasonable worship that was due to him, was not owing to any absolute incapacity in mankind to search after and find him out. The powers and faculties of reason, with which God endowed them, would, had they made the right use and improvement of them, have taught them better; and as there was no defect in the necessary proofs of the being and perfections of the one true God, God having never *left himself without witness* in the darkest ages of the world, their ignorance of him was really voluntary, and became their crime as well as their reproach. † *So that they were altogether without excuse*, because had they but duly attended to the many and clear notices, that God gave them of his being and perfections, they would certainly have found him out, who never was far from any one of them, and paid him that rational reverence and worship, that was due to him, as the Almighty Creator, Preserver, and Sovereign of the world.

And

† Rom. i. 20.

And yet the history of all ages and nations informs us, that there was no principle less understood than that of the existence of God ; nothing as to which men had more false and dishonourable conceptions, than of his attributes and real character ; nothing so unnaturally debased, and that gave rise to, and rendered venerable and sacred, so many childish, absurd and execrable superstitions, as the worship they paid to their respective deities. Many nations scarce retained any notion of one supreme all-governing power, cantoning out the world into so many distinct provinces, each governed by its peculiar god, and every one almost intirely independent of each other ; and † every nation choosing that god, for its peculiar and favourite deity, to whom they appropriated almost exclusive worship, as his character best suited their own dispositions, manners of life, particular views, and reigning vices ; and no one nation amongst the Gentiles ever professing their adherence to the one true God, forming any tolerable sentiments concerning him, or paying him a worship, that had the least appearance of rational in its nature, and that could render the performers of it worthy the regard and favour of the greatest and best of Beings.

Many ages did these absurdities and corruptions prevail, and grew inveterate by long prescription, and universal authority ; and though the nations boasted of their wise men,
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† Minut. Fel. §. 6. p. 51. &c. Edit. Lugd. Bat.

and human philosophy was held in the highest esteem; had its celebrated professors, its famous schools and seminaries, and was resorted to and studied by many in all ranks and conditions of life; yet it proved wholly incapable to produce the desired and needed reformation, and instead of prevailing with men to quit the long received and established errors, and *the vain conversation they had received by tradition from their forefathers*; every succeeding age grew more fertile in gods, added new and worse superstitions, if possible, to the old ones, became more rooted and incurable in their prejudices, more distant from any real reformation, and more incapable of being recovered to knowledge and piety.

Socrates, amongst the *Greeks*, who was said to be declared by an oracle to be the wisest man that lived, was undoubtedly a very extraordinary and excellent person, and of any one in his time probably the fittest, and most capable of instructing others, both in the principles of religion, and in the practice of moral virtue. He had unquestionably more worthy sentiments of both, than most of his contemporaries; and was besides possessed of the greatest sagacity of mind, had a surprizing quickness of apprehension, solidity of judgment, easiness of expression, acuteness of reasoning, and marvellous dexterity in discovering and exposing the sophisms, and false reasonings of the philosophers, who were in high reputation for wisdom and learning amongst

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the *Athenians*. And yet what was this great and good man able to do? Or what change did he introduce into the religion and morals of his country? Though he * was almost intirely engaged in the work of instructing others, thought and declared himself commissioned and employed by God in this very service, and might have saved his life, if he would have promised the *Athenians* never more to concern himself in it; yet *Athens*, instead of hearkening to the venerable *Seer*, murdered him for his endeavouring to reform her; still retained her old superstitions; and though the seat of learning and the *Muses*, and source of wisdom, still continued ignorant of the true God, amidst the innumerable deities she worshiped, was the very sink of superstition, and polluted with the most enormous and unnatural crimes. And so little was the good, that he found himself capable of doing, as that he † expressly declares, that few who attended him gained any considerable advantage from him; that they who did, generally lost it as soon as ever they could no longer converse with him, and that the success of his instructions, in making men good and virtuous, depended on the will and pleasure of God, and was not to be secured without his concurrence.

Of what mighty use were the writings of all the ancient *Greek Philosophers*, when they

* Plat. *Apol. Soc.* p. 29. D. Edit. Serran.

† *Id.* in *Theag.* p. 128. B.

they appeared in the elegance of the *Roman* dress, with which *Cicero* adorned them, and their sentiments were set off with the politeness and charms of his incomparable eloquence? What number of converts did he make from idolatry and vice, to real piety and virtue, by his disquisitions concerning *the nature of the gods*, his treatises of *divination*, his *Tusculan questions*, his tracts of *friendship and old age*, his *paradoxes*, and above all, by those immortal and invaluable books of *the offices and duties of human life*? And though *Epietetus*, *Seneca*, *Arrian*, *M. Tyrius*, and other philosophers, wrote many excellent things in favour of moral virtue; yea though the majesty of the imperial diadem added authority to *M. Antonine's* philosophy, and the emperor of the world condescended to become a kind of preacher and instructor in righteousness; yet still the old superstitions, with all their attending corruptions, maintained their ground and power, and every attempt to introduce a better state of things was found wholly ineffectual and vain.

As this fact is indisputable, and confirmed by the history of all nations; it may be asked, what could be the reasons of this inefficacy of human philosophy and wisdom to reform and save mankind, and that the celebrated names and writings of *Plato*, *Cicero*, *Antonine*, and others, could not effect what *Peter*, and *Paul*, and *John*, and their companions in the Gospel of *Christ*, did in a few

years, by their labours and writings; though they were obscure as to their nation and original, had none, or but few, of the advantages of learning, or oratory, or human power to assist them; yea, even though they were opposed and persecuted, their doctrine ridiculed, and every method taken that human subtlety could invent, and the power of malice could exercise, to stop the progress of it in the world? Many causes may be assigned for this.

The policy and craft of government, that first introduced many of these errors and corruptions, for they are not all the inventions and offspring of priestcraft, found many advantages by them; as they could make the superstitions, which held men in bondage, subservient to their secular views, and by the awe of them, keep them in a state of more intire subjection; and therefore employed all their power and authority to rivet them on the people, and render the practice of them sacred; guarded them by numerous laws, and prohibited any change in them under the severest penalties.

They had, at length, the sanction of antiquity * to render them venerable, and as the children received them as an inheritance from their forefathers, they became rigidly tenacious of them, and counted it a sort of impiety to depart from the maxims and customs of their ancestors. Against this strong barrier of

* Minut. Fel. c. 8. p. 70, 71.

superstition, idolatry, and error, mere human philosophy was too feeble to make any powerful and successful opposition; and the wisdom of the ancients, that had introduced their gods and ceremonies of worship, would not fail to be generally looked on as an effectual confutation of every thing, that after-wisdom could pretend to urge for the amendment or removal of them.

Besides, very eminent § republicks had been founded, and large empires had been erected, continued, and risen to great heights of prosperity; victories had been won, triumphs had been obtained, and arts and sciences had flourished, under the supposed protection of the gods of the nations; ‡ the neglect of their ceremonies was thought to have been punished with the most dreadful calamities, and the due performance of them rewarded with many signal advantages of a publick and private nature, and visible proofs of their interposition and presence; and what could human wisdom and philosophy oppose, to what would be called sensible experience, and arguments from facts? or how could it be expected that princes and nations should relinquish deities, or abrogate rites, to which they imagined they owed their establishment, grandeur, and prosperity?

And had nations and governments been at any time inclined to admit of any reformation in their religious system, where could they have

have applied? and to which of the different schools of philosophy, to which of their celebrated wise men and disputers, could they have had recourse, upon so important an affair? Though there were many sects of philosophers, all of them differing in essentials from each other, and all of them professing to be teachers of wisdom, yet it doth not appear, that amidst all the schemes they formed, they had ever thought of, or fixed upon any regular, rational, and consistent plan of religion for themselves, or the publick. If in any of the remains of antiquity, any such thing as this was likely to be found, it must have appeared in *Plato*, or *Cicero*, or some of the moral writers amongst the ancients. But nothing of this nature is to be seen in any of them; and though they should have agreed as to the particulars that needed alteration, they would have been entirely at a loss what better things to have settled in the room of them. || Some would have been for making an entire ridance of all the gods, and the ceremonies of worship that were performed in honour of them; who as openly, as they could with safety, denied their very existence, their agency and providence, and ascribed the formation of this world to the jumble of atoms, the caprice of chance, or the necessary laws of an irresistible fatality. Amongst those, who professed to own any Deity, it was far from being agreed amongst them what he was,

was, or how to represent and describe him. The wisdom of *Epicurus*, retaining the name of the gods, would have at once discharged the world from all the religious superstitions that had enslaved it, by introducing such as were too happy in themselves to desire any mortal worship, too indolent to concern themselves in the exercise of providence, and too indulgent and luxurious in their own *nectar* and *ambrosia*, to resent the freest gratifications of sensual pleasure in mankind †. And as to any thing that was to come hereafter, this hero would have shewn them the way intirely to get rid of every apprehension about it ; and as for *Erebus* § and *Tartarus*, and *Acheron*, and the punishments of a future state, how to have trampled them intirely under their feet. The wisdom of others led them to imagine, that the whole mundane system was God. — *Jupiter est quodcunque vides*, — that it was absolutely perfect, necessary, eternal, incorruptible, and incapable every single atom of it of being annihilated. Others, with greater wisdom, conceived of God as a mind or spirit ; but such a one as was only the soul to animate the whole material system, as its proper body, and maintain the perpetual life and verdure of it. If some, as perhaps the generality of the philosophers did, who believed in any Deity, held the monarchy of one God, presiding over all things, yet they seem universally to have allowed a large number of inferior

† Lucret. l. 3. *per tot.* § Virgil. *Georg.* l. 2. v. 490.

inferior deities, sharing with him in real divinity, worthy of the same divine adoration, and admitted into the high prerogatives of providence and government; and though their sentiments of Deity were much better than those of the poets and the vulgar, yet they professed to acknowledge the same gods, and worshiped them under the same names, in the same temples, and with the same sacrifices and rites, as others did. This was true even of the celebrated *Socrates* himself, who is, I apprehend, falsely said to have died a martyr for the one God. For *Xenophon*, § who was his contemporary, his friend, and admirer, expressly assures us, that *Socrates* regulated his religion by the laws of the city, advised others to do the same, and censured all who did not, as impertinent and vain persons; and that, in his apology before his judges, he openly declared his belief in the gods of his country, and absolutely denied the charge of introducing new ones, or strange methods of worshiping the old ones. Yea, *Socrates* himself affirms, that he neither sacrificed to, nor swore by, nor called on any new *Demons*, or other gods, instead of *Jupiter*, *Juno*, and other deities with them ||. And though some of the philosophers thought with the utmost contempt of the ceremonies and superstitions, that were practised in honour of the vulgar deities, sometimes ridiculed them, and at other times

§ *Memor. Socr.* p. 708. B. et p. 722. C. Edit. Leuncl.

|| *Xen. Socr. Apol. pro Socr.* p. 705. E.

times reasoned against them; yet they all taught another thing by their practice, falling in with all the superstitions of the age and country in which they lived, and even pleading and writing in defence or excuse of the worship of images, plants, rivers, mountains, fountains, fire, beasts, fowls, fishes, and other the like contemptible objects ||; as a sort of memorials of the gods, and the more effectually to keep up a sense of them in the minds of men; and recommending it in their writings, and even those, in which they treated the religion of their country with great freedom, as an instance of wisdom to adhere to the rites of their forefathers, to retain their gods, and admit of no innovations in worship. Proofs in abundance ‡ of this are easy to be produced from the remains of *Plato*, *Xenophon*, *Cicero*, *Julian*, *Porphry*, and others of the most celebrated philosophers; who not only scandalously complied with those corruptions, which in their minds they condemned, but employed their art and learning in justification and defence of them: A conduct this that must effectually destroy the force of all their best reasonings in favour of truth, and render them absolutely incapable, with all their philosophy and wisdom, had it been much better than it was, of becoming the reformers and saviours of mankind. Especial-

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|| Max. Tyr. *Dissert.* 8. §. 10.

‡ 1. Plat. *De leg.* l. 10. p. 910. *De repub.* l. 4. p. 427. B.
2. Xenoph. *Memor. Soc.* p. 803. B. 3. Cicero. *De Divinat.*
l. 2. §. 72.

ly, if to this we add, that craft and subtlety, with which many of them acted, in the manner of their instruction; having a two-fold doctrine; the one internal, the other external. The internal one contained the real sentiments of their minds, quite different from the opinions of the vulgar, whom they accounted unworthy to be initiated into the great mysteries of truth, and from whom they studiously concealed them; delivering them only to a few favourite select companions, to some choice spirits, and philosophical minds; whilst the external doctrine, which they openly avowed to the multitude, was wholly suited to their gusts and prejudices, and calculated rather to confirm them in their errors, than to convince them of, and reclaim them from them.

And if they had been less blameable on these accounts than they were, yet their manner of instruction was such, as had but little tendency to bring the world to better sentiments and practices. *Socrates* * himself was a real Sceptick, and declared, that he doubted almost of every thing, and scarce knew any thing, but that he knew nothing at all. And with regard to some of the most essential principles of religion, † a future state, and the rewards and punishments of virtue and vice, he lived and died in a state of the greatest uncertainty about them. Besides, ‡ his manner of in-

* *Plat. Apolog.* p. 21. D. E. *et in Menon.* p. 80. C. *Cicer. Acad.* 1. 1. §. 4. † *Plat. Apol. Soc.* p. 40. C. D. *et fine.*
 ‡ *Id. ibid.* p. 37. *in fine.* *Cicer. Academ:* 1. 2. §. 5.

instruction was frequently ironical and sarcastick, sometimes metaphysical and abstruse, and at other times mixed with such kind of subjects, as had nothing of dignity in them, no tendency to convey any solid and useful knowledge; in so much that he tells one, † who applied to him for wisdom, that he knew little else but some small love affairs, and other trifling things of a like nature: not to add several foibles, errors and absurdities, from which all his penetration, wisdom and philosophy were not able to exempt him.

I may add, that the number of those, who pretended to give any instructions in subjects of a moral nature, was but comparatively few; whilst the generality of those, who were esteemed wise men, instructed their disciples in things of a quite different nature; in matters of mere speculation, curious questions, debates about words, the elegance of speech, the arts of polity, and other things of a like kind, of not the least relation to true religion and morality, and that had nothing to do with the nature and reasons of mens acceptance with, and happiness in God; whilst none of them professed to be the teachers of true religion, nor pretended to have themselves, or give to others any rational consistent scheme of it in principle or practice. And on this account human philosophy was utterly incapable of bringing the world to the service and worship of the true God, by the

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† Platon. *Theag.* p. 128. B.

fruits of righteousness, and a life of uniform and regular virtue ; because principles of religion are the best supports and securities of virtue ; the interest of which can never be maintained against the corruptions of the world, and the powerful incentives to vice that every where abound in it, without a rational sense of Deity, and the awes that flow from the belief of his inspection and justice, and the equitable retributions of a future state.

Had there been any of the celebrated philosophers, who pretended to a better scheme of religion, than what was generally received, and to a more rational way of worship, than that which universally prevailed, and set up schools for the instruction of others in these particulars, yet they wanted authority to enforce it, and suitably to engage the attention and regard of mankind. The ancient lawgivers, who settled the ritual of worship amongst their respective nations, either had a divine authority for their religious establishments, or pretended to one, and brought others to believe they had it. *Moses* settled the forms of religion and worship amongst the *Jews*, by immediate warrant from God. *Lycurgus* amongst the *Spartans*, *Solon* at *Athens*, and *Numa* amongst the *Romans*, had each his oracle, or god, or goddess, by whom their constitutions were said to be confirmed, or by whose direction they acted in the establishment of them. But the philosophers, none of them, unless we except *Socrates*, ever pretended

tended to an immediate commission from God; or if they did, gave no authentick proofs of their having it. They had no credentials of miracles, no demonstration of any spirit of power to establish their characters, and give force to their instructions. They were but men, upon a level with others, and had none of them any thing superior to recommend them above others, who taught a quite different scheme from themselves, but the mere weight of their reasonings, and the strength of their proofs; especially above those illustrious and venerable sages, who were supposed to have founded their whole plan of the publick religion by the authority and inspiration of the gods. And however just their reasonings on this subject might have been, yet the bulk of mankind were incompetent judges of them, could not enter into deep and learned disquisitions, not take in a long train of laboured reasoning, nor easily pass the proper judgment between the contending disputants, debating their differences, and each striving to perplex, confound, and confute his adversary. The world was not thus to be converted to truth and piety by the disputers of the age, nor superstition, idolatry and vice, to be rooted out of the mind by such *oppositions of science*, and the contests of men; who by sophistry and plausible colours, might render it extremely dubious where the victory fell, obscure the most evident truths, and make it,
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morally speaking, impossible for the generality to discover, or embrace them.

To all that hath been said may be added; that as the common opinions and religious usages had the prescription of venerable antiquity, and the high reputation of a divine original, were supported by the general authority, the universal practice of nations, and the almost unanimous consent of mankind, so they were consistent with all their favourite passions, interests, tastes, pursuits, amusements, pleasures, and vices. The great things, by which they imagined their gods were honoured, were splendid temples, costly sacrifices, pompous ceremonies, games and sports, wrestlings, racings, boxings, quoits, and such like bodily exercises, and trials of manhood: not to mention some more criminal customs, which cannot be named without a blush, nor practised without infamy. The very deities they worshipped were polluted with the worst of crimes, patrons of vice, and very religiously invoked by those, who intended the villainies they respectively patronised; and nothing was to be feared from their resentment and vengeance, when their votaries only imitated their examples, and were guilty of nothing, but what they themselves had before committed with impunity. So that the very religion of the gentiles was in truth a religion fit for men of liberty, luxury, and pleasure; a religion without piety, virtue, or morals; that consecrated the very sports of men into
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acts of devotion, and under the countenance of which, the gratification of the very worst of passions was accounted, on many occasions, a real act of religious veneration and homage. And what could mere human philosophy do to correct so vitiated a taste? What great efficacy had it ever in fact, to clear these prejudices out of the breasts of men, to subdue the strong passions for these shews and exercises, that had bewitched and captivated the whole heathen world, and put a stop to those enormities, to which natural inclination prompted them, and which were thought highly honourable and acceptable to the gods they worshipped. In such circumstances, had human wisdom and philosophy been much more perfect, than they ever appear to have been, they could not have stemmed the furious torrent, that bore down all truth and righteousness before it; and I think, upon the whole, we may be allowed to say, that it must be the voice and power of God, and not the power, eloquence and wisdom of men, that alone was able to awaken in them better sentiments, cure their deep-rooted prejudices, bring them to the acknowledgment of himself, and the belief and approbation of pure, undefiled and acceptable religion. And this brings me

II. To the second general, which is to set before you, that great and important change God was pleased to introduce amongst mankind;

kind ; for which human philosophy and wisdom had been so long found by experience to be altogether ineffectual. Since the world was not to be convinced, and brought to the acknowledgment and worship of God, as the great and glorious Creator, by the numerous marks of power, wisdom, and skill that abounded in all his works ; God was pleased to take this affair into his own hands, and to bring about the salvation of mankind, by means of his own immediate appointment. *It pleased God to save them that believe*, by introducing the gospel of Christ, and bringing them to the knowledge and belief of it.

Now this salvation consists, in mens being delivered from that gross ignorance, and those destructive prejudices and errors, in matters of the greatest importance and concern, under which they had for many ages lain, and for which human wisdom had never been able to find out and apply any competent remedy. This God effected, by *causing the light of the glorious gospel of his Son, to shine in upon their hearts*, and carry such full conviction of the truth of the principles it revealed, as rendred them sincere converts to the belief of them. In this the one only living and true God is represented in the clearest view, in the infinite perfection and rectitude of his nature, in the universal providence which he exercises, and especially in his abundant mercy and goodness, the riches of his grace, and his eternal and unchangeable purposes, in reference to their
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eternal redemption by Jesus Christ. Here we farther learn, what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, what is that pure and undefiled worship which he requires, what those dispositions and affections he would have us cultivate, what those duties he would have us perform, what those hopes he allows us to cherish, and what that reward and happiness we may finally expect from his infinite and unmerited goodness. Herein we have that most important discovery of a future state, the impartial judgment of the world to come, and the great events of everlasting life and death, that are hereafter to take place, in consequence of our present actions, whether good or evil. Ignorance in these things is not only the shame and reproach of mankind, but of the most dangerous consequence to them; and though the philosophy of the antients conveyed few or no just sentiments in these particulars, seldom pretended to give any clear decisive instructions concerning them; and left the world for many ages almost intirely in the dark, or in a state of the most absolute uncertainty about them; yet the gospel of Christ, the moment it is attended to and embraced, instantly dispels the darkness, opens the mind to the most useful discoveries, and brings men at once to the knowledge of all those interesting truths, which they can be concerned to understand, in order to discharge their duty, and secure their happiness. And had it not been for this hea-

venly light, we had unquestionably been to this day in the same substantial night and palpable darkness, as to these principles, that they were, and are, who never enjoyed it. Redemption from ignorance, superstition, and error, into the knowledge of God, and all the genuine doctrines of religion, comes only by the gospel of Christ, and is not to be obtained by any other institution whatsoever; and by whomsoever it is regarded and received as a divine revelation, it will infallibly prove the power of God thus to enlighten and save them.

And what renders this salvation of God the more valuable is, the answerable change it introduces, into the religious practices and morals of mankind; so great and so intire a one, as that the Scriptures represent it by *a new creation, regeneration, and being born again, the putting off the old, and putting on the new man*; which though figurative expressions, yet have a real meaning, and certainly denote such an intirely new moral disposition and character, as renders persons intirely different from their former selves; as though God had formed them anew, given them a second and better birth, and quite altered them from the men they were before. These expressions had unquestionably a peculiar emphasis, as applied to those, who were converts from the rites and corrupt practices of the *Jews*, and especially from the impieties, idolatries, and vices that abounded in the Gentile world. Here with

with the utmost propriety it might be said, *all old things were done away, and all things became new*; nor are the expressions too strong, when applied to denote that change, which is made in the dispositions and characters of those, who are now reclaimed from a sensual profligate state, by the word and spirit of God, and prevailed with seriously to enter into the spirit and life of genuine christianity. For how intire, how happy is the change! How different are the dispositions and affections they cherish and exercise towards God and man! dispositions of reverence, love, gratitude, trust, submission, and obedience towards him; dispositions of universal righteousness, benevolence, humanity, and goodness towards them. How intirely altered is their conduct towards both! Instead of not retaining God in their hearts, he intirely possesses them, *and in every state in which they are, they abide, and walk humbly with him.* No longer placing religion in superstitions, rites and ceremonies, they worship him in spirit and truth; by the exercise of pure affections, by the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and thanksgivings, and by abounding in all the good works essential to the christian life and character. And with respect to men, instead of *uncleanness, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, envies, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like manifest works of the flesh*, oh how different are those *fruits of the spirit*, in which, as believers in Christ, they abound! love, joy,

peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness and temperance; those necessary and amiable virtues, that are so ornamental to men, so promotive of their peace, so acceptable to God, and so promotive of their eternal happiness in his favour. This is that salvation * which it pleases God to make men partakers of by the gospel of his son, this that blessed change he introduces into the moral state and character of all who believe it; and there is such a life and power, such an authority, spirit and efficacy that accompanies, and is conveyed by it, as is capable of removing the most inveterate prejudices, and subduing the strongest habits of sin, and as will render those, who are under the influence of its principles and motives, equal to all the most important obligations of human life, and superior to all the difficulties that may attend the practice of religion and virtue. But in this respect, mere philosophy is lifeless as a stone, and cold as death, as to any efficacy it hath to make men partakers of this salvation, in comparison with the word of God; which the author to the *Hebrews* describes, as † *quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, and as piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and as a discernor of the very inmost thoughts and intents of the heart*; i. e. capable of reaching the conscience, of purifying the heart, of separating men from their long accustomed vices, and forming them into the love, the life

* Lactant. lib. 3. §. 26;

† Heb. iv. 12.

life and practice of universal piety and goodness, in order to train them up for eternal salvation in the kingdom and presence of God, according to the fixed constitution of God by Christ, that if *we have our fruit unto holiness, the end shall be life everlasting.*

In the beginning of christianity our apostle, whom God employ'd to *make manifest the savour of his knowledge* amongst the Gentiles, had abundant reason to cry out with triumph : *It pleased God to save them that believe ;* inasmuch as he was the instrument of the providence and grace of God, to prevail with multitudes amongst the Gentiles, to accept of the salvation he offered them ; and because the change in their religious and moral behaviour was such, as excited the wonder of mankind in general, and the hatred and malice of those, who continued the inveterate enemies of Christ, both amongst the *Jews* and Gentiles. St. Paul often speaks of his success, *and the free course by which the word of God was glorified*, with triumph and thankfulness to God ; insomuch that in his time he could say, that * *it was gone into all the world, and brought forth fruit*, i. e. had been preached to almost all nations, and had every where made numerous converts ; † *opening men's eyes, turning them from darkness to light, from the power of sin and satan to God, that they might serve the living and true God, receive the forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance amongst*

* Colof. i. 6.

† Acts xxvi. 18.

amongst them that are sanctified by faith. And there are remains even in Heathen writers that confirm the Apostle's account ; both as to the number of converts to the religion of Christ, and the excellent nature of that change which their conversion produced in them. The testimony of *Pliny*, * in his letter to *Trajan* the emperor, is remarkable, and full to this point, who informs him ; that the only fault or error of which the Christians could be convicted was, that they sung praises to Christ as a God amongst themselves, obliged themselves by a sacrament or oath, to commit no wickedness, thefts, robberies, or adulteries, to betray no trust, and to withhold no deposit ; that there were many of every age, and order, of both sexes, that were accused ; that the towns and villages were infected with their superstition, that the temples of the gods were almost desolate, and that there were few to buy the sacrifices of the gods. And another, an ancient heathen, and a long while an enemy to Christ, about the end of the second century, reproaches the Christians in these terms. † “ You despise our temples
 “ as sepulchres ; you treat our gods with
 “ indignity ; you deride all our sacred rites ;
 “ you contemn the honours and purples of
 “ our priests. Why do you worship an invi-
 “ sible, concealed God ? You have no altars,
 “ no temples, no known images ; through
 “ fear you abstain from fashionable pleasures ;
 “ you

* Epist. lib. 10. Epist. 97.

† Minut. Fel. cap. 8, 9, 12.

“ you come not to our spectacles and public shews ; you are present at none of our solemnities, at our publick feasts you are absent ; our sacred games, the feasts we make on our sacrifices, our libations upon our altars you abhor ; your heads ye do not crown with flowers ; your bodies not perfume with ointments ; these you reserve for funerals, you deny garlands to your sepulchres, and on these accounts are worthy of our pity.” Oh ! how causeless was this pity ! how truly honourable were these reproaches, to those who really deserved them ! How worthy of imitation was that singularity, which was imputed to them as their unhappiness and crime ! How clearly doth it demonstrate the efficacy and power of the doctrine of Christ over their hearts and lives, the influence of their principles, and their steadiness to them ; the sanctity of their manners, and their real salvation from the idolatries of the world, and the numerous corruptions of the times in which they lived ! And let me add upon this head :

That all those, who in our own times, are brought to the belief and obedience of the gospel, are substantial proofs of the efficacy of the doctrine of Christ, and that it *is the power of God to their salvation.* And indeed *Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for evermore.* The principles of his religion are eternal and immutable truths, and have still their original sacred influence and tendency.

dency. The motives to repentance and conversion, which his gospel offers, retain their native intrinsic weight and efficacy, and will convince and save men to the end of time, if they receive, and heartily attend to them. The worship it prescribes, and the duties of piety and virtue which it enforces, are reasonable in their nature, cannot but be acceptable to the greatest and best of beings, and must gain the approbation and esteem of all who are acquainted with them; and on all these accounts the gospel of our Lord is, in its whole constitution, the most powerful and certain means of saving those who believe it from every destructive practice, and preparing them for, and rendring them finally partakers of eternal salvation. And whosoever *hath learnt of Christ, and been taught the truth as it is in him*; hath been prevented from entering into the criminal practices of the world, or recovered from them by the influence of his word and spirit, and effectually persuaded by the grace of his gospel to *live a sober, righteous and godly life*; all such are become wise in the most essential points of knowledge, and to them *Christ is actually made of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and eternal redemption*. They are a continued evidence of the great excellency of the gospel scheme, that it is still owned and succeeded by God, and that the means which he hath appointed to convey the knowledge of it, and render it effectual to promote the
salvation

salvation of the world, are worthy the provision of his wisdom, and well adapted to answer the end, he designed to secure by the use of them. And this leads us to the third general head,

III. Which is to inquire, what this method was, by which it pleased God to save them that believe. *It pleased God by preaching to save them that believe.* What the wise man could not effect by his wisdom, nor the scribe by his learning, nor the disputer by his skill in controversy, nor human philosophy by her instructions, God in his infinite wisdom accomplished, by preaching salvation through a crucified Saviour. He first sent his Son into the world, as a teacher of divine truth, and a preacher of righteousness; and afterwards commissioned the Apostles of Christ to the same sacred employment, sending them amongst mankind, as his messengers and *heralds*, for so the original word, we render *preachers*, properly signifies, to proclaim his will, to instruct men in his truth, to recover them from their sins, to raise them to a spiritual and divine life, and call them to the inheritance of everlasting blessedness. Preaching was the original method of propagating christianity, and the essential characteristic of an apostolick and primitive bishop; and if there was, as I think, there was a difference in dignity and station, between the bishops and elders of the church, it was

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this; that the bishops * *fed the flock of God, and took the oversight thereof, and became ensamples to it.* These were they, who because † *they were over them in the Lord, and admonished them, were to be esteemed very highly in love for their works sake, and who, because they ‡ laboured in the word and doctrine were especially to be counted worthy of double honour.* Even the very Apostles themselves were ordained by Christ, || *that he might send them forth to preach;* and though they suffered shame for his name, they ceased not daily in the temple, and in every house § *to teach and preach Jesus Christ.* The great Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul declares of himself, that he was not sent to baptize, ** *but to preach the gospel;* that a necessity was laid upon him to do it, and says: *Woe to me, if I preach not the gospel.* And on this account he magnifies the grace of God towards himself, that †† *to him, who was less than the least of all saints, this favour was granted, that he should preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.* And in his exhortation to Timothy, he solemnly charges him before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead, ††† *preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, i. e. take every opportunity, whether stated or occasional, to preach the gospel;* and it was by this means that the nations were *delivered from ignorance, idolatry,*

* 1 Pet. v. 2, 3. † 1 Theff. v. 13. ‡ 1 Tim. v. 17.
 || Mark iii. 14. § Act. v. 42. ** 1 Cor. ix. 16. †† Eph. iii. 8.
 ††† 2 Tim. iv. 1, 2.

try, and the power of darkness, translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, and made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

And how well suited is this method of preaching to the nature of men, and those reasonable powers and faculties, which God hath bestowed on them? Instruction is the source of knowledge, and the inlet to all useful and important truth. It is what opens the mind, draws attention, exercises and enlarges the capacities of men, furnishes thoughts, awakens reflection, conveys evidence, creates conviction, and is absolutely necessary to all valuable improvements in every useful part of science. It is especially requisite to religious knowledge, to cultivate the mind by principles of truth, and the dispositions of piety and virtue; to direct men's fears, and inspire them with hopes; to fix their resolutions, and animate their endeavours; and in a word, to form them into justice, humanity, a divine nature, and every thing that is truly excellent and praise-worthy. And easy as the knowledge of true religion and virtue may seem, and however useless preaching or instruction may be thought by the wise men and philosophers of the present age, who boast of the divine perfection and sufficiency of reason, and treat revelation as a useless provision for their information and instruction; yet the whole history of mankind shews the folly of such an imagination; and the circumstances in

which men are born, and generally educated and brought up, abundantly prove, that the whole welfare, dignity, happiness and usefulness of life, in great measure, depend on the early culture and formation of the mind by kind and prudent, and faithful lessons of true wisdom and knowledge; without which men must, without a miracle, grow up wholly sensual and brutal, and without any other guide or rule of their actions but their passions and appetites. And therefore there can be no reasonable objection against the propriety of this method of acquainting them with the gospel of Christ; because preaching, which is nothing but instruction, is the natural way of learning men truth, removing their prejudices, and bringing them to approve the doctrines and precepts of pure and undefiled religion; and indeed they have no other way of receiving knowledge, or being made wise to salvation but this. For whether men are publicly instructed in the church, or in their own or others houses, it is still preaching, without any other difference, but that the one is publick, and the other private preaching; or if they read the writings and books of others, they are as really preached and dictated to by those authors, though in a silent manner, as though they were to preach and dictate to them by word of mouth. And the instruction of the church hath this preference, that large numbers are equally capable of attending

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ing it, and many, who can have instruction no other way. I would add:

That preaching, or instruction in righteousness and truth, is peculiarly suitable to the nature of the gospel dispensation; which is an appeal to the reason and consciences of mankind, and was originally intended to be made known and propagated by persuasion and argument, and the gentle methods of conviction and intreaty. Imposture, which hath nothing of intrinsick excellency to recommend itself, nor divine authority to support it, naturally hath recourse to artifice and fraud, to disguise or concealment, or to force and violence, to supply the want of evidence, and compel men to submit to her. But the gospel of Christ utterly disclaims all such methods as these, *walks not in craftiness*, but *renounces with abhorrence the hidden things of dishonesty*; hath nothing, and wishes and wants nothing, but its own native truth and excellency to recommend it; seeks only for converts, *by approving itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God*, and persuading them, by that full evidence which it sets before them, that its original is truly divine, and that it is their duty and interest willingly to submit to the power and conduct of it.

If instruction and persuasion fail, christianity hath no other methods of making proselytes, but condemns and forbids all measures, that worldly policy can suggest, or human power and terror can practise, to promote its
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interest, and enlarge the number of its admirers and converts. So cautious was our Apostle of propagating the doctrine of the gospel, by any means that might seem to reflect on, or make others in the least suspect its divine original; that he would not preach it *with excellency of speech, or the enticing words of man's wisdom*; did not in his language affect the sublime, nor dress up the doctrines he preached in the laboured ornaments of human eloquence and oratory; that the faith of those he preached to might *not stand in the wisdom of men*, but appear to be the effect of the power of God, manifested in that *demonstration of the spirit*, by which the preaching a crucified Saviour was continually attended. Much less did he recommend secular methods, worldly emoluments, or penalties, to rear up the christian church in its infancy, or secure her dominion and authority, when grown up to her full maturity; because he well knew, that all means of this kind were absolutely unnatural, could not create rational conviction, nor produce in men that faith, which is necessary to render them acceptable believers in Christ, and intitle them to everlasting salvation by him. And whenever they enter into the communion of any christian church, merely thro' the allurements of temporal advantages, or the terrors of secular punishments, they are so far converts upon very dishonourable terms, both to themselves, and the church to which they reconcile themselves; and it is of little con-

consequence to true religion, and wise men, who loses, or who gains them. The only profelytes to any church, that are worth having, or glorying in, are men of steady honour and integrity; who will neither make merchandise of their principles for profit, nor sink them through shame or fear; who are what they profess to be, from conviction of judgment, and the force of evidence, and continue stedfast and immoveable in their principles and practice, in spite of all temptations to disguise and desert them; and we may assure ourselves, that all attempts to propagate christianity, besides the original one of preaching to, and endeavouring *in Christ's stead* to beseech, to persuade, and prevail with men to embrace it, are false and spurious, and have not the least shadow of warrant from divine revelation. *If*, after all that we can do by preaching and instruction, *the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost*. It is at their own peril they reject it; and if our persuasions will not prevail with them to become reconciled to God, we are to commit the cause to him, who judges righteously. All that is left us is, to pity and pray for them; and if our spiritual weapons fail, we have no commission to have recourse to carnal ones, and they are, of all others, the most improper we can make use of.

And indeed we want none of them. For when the Gospel is preached in its original simplicity, when the doctrines of it are right-
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ly explained, and impartially stated; when the evidences of its truth are meekly and fairly represented; and the great motives to believe and obey it, derived from the promises and threatnings of the Gospel, are held up to mens view in their proper importance, and warmly impressed on their consciences; it will carry its weight, and, through the concurrence of the blessing of God, even now have its effect upon all sincere and well-disposed minds, as it had upon its first publication.

It is not indeed to be expected, that our preaching should be always successful. Even with respect to our Lord, *who spake as never man did*, there were many who *did not believe his report*, and the people, he immediately came to, rejected and clamoured him to the cross. And as to his Apostles, who preached under the demonstration of the Spirit, their preaching was treated with contempt, as foolishness, and themselves persecuted with an implacable hatred. And there will be men in all ages, in whose account our office, as preachers, will be vile, and by whom the whole gospel-scheme will be looked on as absurd, and treated with ridicule and scorn. But these things ought not to move us. *Wisdom will finally be justified of all her children.* We know the characters of the men, who disdain to submit to the Gospel, and to have any thing to do with the preachers of it; the proud and insolent, the vain and conceited, the ignorant and blind, the sons of luxury and pleasure,

pleasure, the profane and profligate; in a word, all those heroes and worthies, that are too wise to be taught of God, are hardened in wickedness, are grown incapable of repentance, are insensible to the fairest and fullest evidence, are out of the reach of conviction, and fitted in their disposition and character for final destruction. From men of this cast we expect no friendship. But let them go on. They will sooner or later find *this their way is their folly*, by methods of conviction, too strong for them possibly to resist. Others will be found, who will judge more impartially, and act with greater candour and prudence. The meek and humble, the thoughtful and serious, the honest and impartial, the friends of religion, and the lovers of virtue; in a word, those who have a due reverence for God, a just sense of the imperfect corrupted state of human nature, who wish for an intire restoration to the image and favour of God, and have a wise solicitude and concern for their own salvation; these, we may justly hope, will never despise us *for our works sake*, nor cast contempt on the message we deliver them from the word of God. These properly come within the reach of the gospel-call, and our ministry; by these instruction will be attended to, they will examine, and judge, as wise men, whether the gospel-reports are reasonable in themselves, worthy of God, and suitable to their own condition, as dying creatures, and ob-

noxious offenders; and having no interest not to be convinced, nor too much wisdom to imagine that they need no instruction from the God of wisdom, nor credulity enough to believe that they can save themselves without the aid and grace of God, and that the gospel of Christ can contribute nothing to their salvation; they will, as the effect of their inquiry, esteem the knowledge of Christ to be the most desirable and important, regard with seriousness those instructions, that may best improve them in it, and consider and attend the preaching of the gospel as an institution of Christ, designed by him to build them up in faith and holiness, and prepare them for the final commendation and acceptance of their Lord and Master. Let us then,

IV. In the last place, inquire into the nature and causes of that severe censure, which the wise men and philosophers passed upon this method, which it pleased God to make use of for the salvation of mankind. *It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.* I scarce need put you in mind, that when the Apostle speaks of *this foolishness* of preaching, he doth not speak of what he thought it to be, or what it was really in itself; but of what it was in the opinion and estimation of those, who were *wise after the flesh*; men of perverted judgments, and sensual dispositions, who could relish nothing that was contrary to their prejudices, the
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systems of philosophy they had adopted, and the interests and pleasures of the present life. Though Christ crucified was *unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness, yet to them that were called, who understood and believed, Christ was the power of God, and the wisdom of God*; they esteemed the method of salvation by the cross of Christ a wise appointment, and found it effectual to recover them to knowledge, virtue and eternal happiness. And the Apostle expressly declares, that in his preaching * *he spoke the wisdom of God*, a really divine philosophy, as he declared to them the counsels and decrees of God's eternal wisdom, revealed to him by that spirit § *which searcheth all things, even the deep things, or the hidden purposes of God*. And indeed there is nothing that more evidently discovers the conduct of the divine wisdom, than the bringing about so wonderful a change in the moral state and condition of the world, by means, to all human probability, so unlikely and incapable of effecting it, and which the great and mighty, the wise and learned generally treated with sovereign contempt and scorn; so that the Apostle had good reason to say; that || *the foolishness of God was wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men*; i. e. that that method of God to reform and save the world, which *Jews* and *Gentiles* esteemed folly and weakness, was capable of

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* 1 Cor. ii. 7.

§ Ibid. ver. 8.

|| 1 Cor. i. 25.

effecting, what the united wisdom and power of mankind were never able to accomplish.

It is true, that preaching may be so managed, as properly to merit the character of foolishness, and deservedly to excite the ridicule and contempt of mankind. When persons preach either their passions, or their party, their power, or interest ; when they enter into dark or whimsical speculations, or *teach the doctrines of men instead of the truths and commandments of God* by Christ; when they recommend for christianity mere principles without morality, or bare morality without principles, or empty ceremonies in the room of real vital religion and godliness ; when they affirm without proof, and require to be believed without conviction ; when they indulge to great improprieties in the expressions they use, or the manner of their preaching ; in these and the like cases, it is not to be wondered at, that the wiser part of mankind should be offended ; since wisdom can never approve of folly, or truth of falsehood, or decency of what is unbecoming, nor the goodness of the matter alter the nature of an impertinent and ridiculous manner of delivering it. But in this sense the preaching of the Apostles was far from foolishness ; they preached not themselves but Christ, not their own passions, but the truth of Christ in sobriety ; they reasoned, they convinced by argument, they spake with gravity, as became the oracles of God ; and if they had any defects, in the manner of their delivery,

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very, as *St. Paul* seems to have had, they were natural, and not acquired, not from art and affectation; and the truth and good sense which they delivered made an ample amends for this disadvantage, and prevented any reasonable disgust that might arise from it.

The reason therefore why the world accounted the preaching of the Gospel foolishness, was not that the doctrine of it was incredible or false, or the preaching it an improper method to demonstrate and propagate the truth of it, or the manner in which our Apostle preached was fantastick and ridiculous; but arose from their own unreasonable prejudices, the vicious taste that prevailed amongst them, and because it had nothing in it to gratify their pride; was intirely different from all those speculations, in which all the several schools of philosophy had been long conversant, and because it wanted that culture, and elegance, and those graces of language and expression, without which nothing to them could be persuasive and grateful. *The Greeks sought after wisdom*; some such sort of philosophical subjects and disputes, with which the several sects amused themselves and others, and in which they placed the very quintessence of true understanding and wisdom; something from the *Platonick*, *Stoick*, or *Epicurean* schools; some curious speculations about the nature of the gods, divination, fate, liberty, certainty, scepticism, mythology, natural causes, and such like subjects, that had long occupied

cupied their attention, and which were the only ones they had any taste or relish for, and which alone they thought deserved their study or regard. In this situation of mind,

They must necessarily esteem the very doctrine of the cross itself foolishness, an idle romantick story, destitute of foundation, and unworthy to be believed. They could not apprehend, how one who was condemned and crucified as a malefactor, and died in such circumstances of ignominy and pain, could be the author of salvation to others, or *appointed to judge the world in righteousness*. And as to the resurrection from the dead, they esteemed it as *a thing impossible* for God to effect, or not desirable if possible; and treated it with mockery and scorn at *Athens*, when the Apostle preached it to them; and imagined, *what will this babler say*, was a sufficient answer to every thing he could urge on such subjects as these. But herein they gave no great proof of their superior wisdom. For had they attended to the innocence and dignity of our Saviour's character, the excellency of his doctrine, the miracles of his life, and the injustice and wickedness of his crucifixion; had they considered that the same power of God, which originally formed man a living creature out of the dust of the earth, was equally able to recover him from the same dust to a new life, and that the resurrection taught by the Apostle, was not a resurrection to a second frail and corruptible

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state of being, but to immortality and glory; their objections against christianity would instantly have lost their force, they would have no longer censured the doctrine of the cross as foolish or incredible, but have embraced it as a divine truth, and esteemed it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, *that Christ came into the world to save sinners*. And though they might have reasonably concluded, that a real malefactor, justly executed for his crimes, could never be appointed the Saviour of sinners; yet as they had even at *Athens*, in *Socrates*, an instance of a great and wise and good mans being put to death, for preaching up doctrines offensive to the prejudices of the people, and the religion of the state; it was easy to see, that an innocent, God-like person, put to death by wicked hands, and raised up from death by the power of God, and advanced to a state of glory, in vindication of his innocence, and as the reward of his sufferings, was every way worthy to be believed and trusted in as Saviour and Lord.

The circumstances and characters of the persons, who were employed to preach this doctrine, farther prejudiced them against it, and made them treat both them and it with contempt and scorn. They were in poverty and straits, of mean and servile employments, without any advantages of birth, family, fortune, or education, had little or no human learning, no titles to distinguish them, no interest in, or countenance from the rich and learned

learned to recommend and support them, and that might second, and give weight to their instructions. On such as these the Scribes and Pharisees, and learned doctors of the *Jewish* law, looked down with contempt. And as to the polite *Greeks*, they could look upon the Apostles as nothing better than *Barbarians*, who scarce understood their language, had never been conversant in the writings of their philosophers, got their bread by labouring with their own hands, and appeared to be amongst the meanest and lowest of the people. It was no wonder then, that elated and conceited with the opinion they had of their own merit, and the high estimation they were in with the people, they should use the Apostles with scorn, treat their pretences to a divine mission with ridicule, and laugh at them as vain and idle projectors, for attempting to correct the errors, and reform the rites of religion, that were of long standing, and had universally prevailed; and thus setting themselves up for wiser and greater men, than all the ancient sages and lawgivers, who had established the ritual of their religion, and than all their most celebrated priests, worthies and philosophers, who universally complied with it.

But though the Apostles had most of them little or no advantage from learning and education; especially from that learning, which was of the highest estimation amongst the Gentiles, and therefore could not set off the doctrine

trine they taught with that art and eloquence; that might have rendered it somewhat more palatable and respectable to the world; though they were in necessities, oppressed and persecuted; yet this was no argument against the truth of their doctrine, nor any reason for not giving it a fair attention. Amongst the *Jewish* prophets *Amos* was an herdsman, and most of them were hated and persecuted by the people. *Socrates* amongst the *Greeks* was a poor man, and slandered and murdered for his very excellences; and *Epietetus*, amongst the *Romans*, had been in the wretched and despicable condition of a slave, lived in perpetual poverty, and was so destitute of the conveniences of life, that in his cottage at *Rome* he had nothing else but his bed and pillow, that he lay on. But was their philosophy ever the worse for their poverty? Or would any man of common sense object, they could not be wise or honest men, because they were not rich ones? If the circumstances of the Apostles were mean, and they were men of no education, and yet taught a more excellent religion and morality, than the learned instructors of their own nation, should it not have been inquired: *Whence had these men all this wisdom?* And if they suffered for what they preached, the natural inference was, that they were themselves sincere, and believed the things they spake; and that therefore what they taught deserved attention, and demanded a very serious and impartial examination, be-

fore it was censur'd and reject'd as folly, Truth and virtue are not the possession of the rich and learned only, nor are they ever the less amiable and sacred, because they appear not in the habit of human philosophy, and have not the charms of oratory to recommend them. They are lovely in themselves, without any foreign ornaments to set them off, and wise and good men will behold them with admiration, and listen to their instructions, whatever be the external condition of those who place them in their view, and present them with the opportunity of knowing and conversing with them; and the prejudices that men entertain against either, merely because the circumstances of those, whom providence employs in spreading the knowledge of them amongst others, are not such as suit the pride and vanity of worldly men, are absolutely unreasonable in themselves, and criminal in the sight of God. And in this the divine wisdom and power eminently displayed themselves, that though Christ crucified was thus *to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness*, yet he supported the doctrine, contemptible as it was esteemed, and violently as it was oppos'd, till it became the doctrine of the world; subdued empires and kingdoms to its belief, triumphed over all the powers of darkness, and introduced that change of principle, religion and morals, throughout most of the nations of the known world, which human wisdom never could do in any one
single

single nation, where it tried its utmost force, and appeared with all the advantages that learning, wit, and oratory could procure it. Here we may cry out with the apostle : † *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out.* From what hath been said we may infer :

I. That it is not generally owing to any superior wisdom, that men count the preaching of the doctrines of the gospel foolishness, and treat all publick instruction in christian piety and virtue, with negligence and contempt. Supposing that the persons, who allow themselves in this liberty, should be the exceeding wise persons they apprehend themselves to be, and do really know as much as any of those, who call themselves preachers or ministers, do ; yet surely they do not imagine that all the rest of mankind are quite as wise as themselves. If they are above instruction, many others may not be so, but may have a great deal of need of having the principles of religion explained to them, and being informed what is their duty towards God and man. And methinks benevolence and humanity should lead them to countenance publick instruction for the sake of others, if they should not want it themselves.

Besides, the wisest of men do not always think of what they know, and are not sometimes so good as one would wish them to be ; and if they can get no information by preach-

ing, they may at least be put in mind of what they have forgot, and have those good things brought to their remembrance, the recollection of which may be of very great advantage to them, and help them to pass through life with greater innocence and dignity.

But to say the truth, they who, generally speaking, exclaim most against preaching the gospel, as an unnecessary and foolish thing, and wholly absent themselves from the instructions of the house of God, have given very few convincing proofs, that they have been blessed with that superior knowledge, with which they seem to plume themselves, or that they have any desire to excel others in their religious and moral attainments. In ancient times, to say nothing of the present, the philosophers and sages, who attained to the highest reputation for wisdom, were men of close application, laborious study, abstracted almost from the common employments of life, whose proper business was the pursuit of knowledge, who carefully read the most celebrated writers, travelled in pursuit of wisdom, and conversed with the wisest and best of men they could meet with, in the several parts of the world through which they journeyed. But who are those peerless wise men in our times, who look down with such sovereign contempt upon all publick instruction, and those whose office and desire it is to improve others by giving it? I appeal to the whole world, whether it is not generally the young and unexperienced, persons

sons in the dawn of life, who have been bred up from children in pleasure or secular employments, who have never had leisure and opportunity for much enquiry, who have never been able to make any impartial judgment, in the great articles in which they pretend to determine, who have never conversed with men wiser than themselves, who have never had time or learning enough to read those things, which they ought to be acquainted with, before ever they can with integrity reject the gospel, or pronounce the preaching it to be foolishness? Yea, are they not such, as know almost nothing, but what they have collected from the conversation of unprincipled men, and a few books, written on one side of the question only, and written on purpose to load with difficulties principles that cannot be disproved, and to conceal the evidence of them, by turning of the mind from the positive proofs attending them, and starting objections, merely to entangle and confound, to create uncertainty and doubt, and prevent the possibility of all rational conviction? Thus furnished, they modestly commence adepts in science, and before they have well begun life, attain to that perfection of wisdom, which others have been pursuing through a long, laborious course of study; intrepidly reject doctrines as absurd and groundless, almost by intuition, or some kind or other of sudden inspiration, which others of learning, and confessedly of great judgment in studies of the most severe and critical nature, have, after the most

most serious examination, judged both to be true, and of infinite importance; thus becoming at once wiser than the best instructors, and turning their backs upon all of them in general, not only as an useless, but as an enthusiastick, bigotted, interested set of men, that deserve no countenance or regard. Thus it is to be wise betimes, and these the effects of this kind of instinctive knowledge, so happily gained by our modern choice spirits, without the pains of study, or the drudgery of long and laborious enquiry. I shall only add, that the religion and morals of these extraordinary persons are too generally as conspicuous and eminent, as their attainments in knowledge and wisdom; and that they give the fullest proofs, that they esteem the doctrines of the gospel and the preaching them foolishness, because they hate the restraints of what they count superstition, are too wise to desire to become *righteous over much*, and too prudent to be made uneasy in those liberties of life, which their principles of philosophy lead them to indulge. But,

II. Let us, who are engaged in this sacred service of preaching the doctrines of the gospel, be chearful and diligent in the discharge of our duty, nor ever be persuaded to desert it, by any worldly or lucrative considerations whatsoever. It is a good and an honourable office, and when executed with care, fidelity, and prudence, will be useful to society, comfortable to ourselves, and acceptable to God. I do not concern myself with the controversy

troverſy about *the indelibility* of the office. But this I will venture to ſay; that when once any perſon hath ſolemnly taken upon himſelf the goſpel miniſtry, hath publicly declared his purpoſe of devoting himſelf to it, and been ſolemnly recommended to God for his bleſſing in the ſervice, in conſequence of ſuch a declaration; there ought to be ſome very ſtriking, and more than ordinary reaſon for his after deſerting it. If men, by bodily indispoſitions, are rendered incapable of performing with ſafety the duties of this ſtation, this ſeems to be a providential diſpenſation, and the will of God muſt be acquieſced in. But I ſhould think, that to a rightly diſpoſed mind, even ſuch a diſmiſſion from ſo good a work would be attended with ſome degree of uneaſineſs and pain. And if I judge right, there is a delicacy of behaviour that is peculiarly neceſſary, and naturally expected from perſons in ſuch a ſituation; and when they maintain the dignity of their former characters by an exemplary piety, do not enter into thoſe liberties of life, nor eagerly purſue thoſe amuſements and pleaſures, they have formerly cautioned others againſt; when they maintain an inviolable and cordial friendship towards thoſe, in whoſe labour and ſervice in the goſpel they have been companions, do not entirely deſert that communion which they themſelves have been the inſtruments of maintaining, as though they were aſhamed of, or are afraid of being reproached for it, or for the ſake of ingratiating them-

themselves with those, who may despise or condemn it, and shew by their own examples that they still preserve an honourable esteem for the solemn services of divine worship; such an exactness and prudence of behaviour every wise man of every party will justify, it will secure the opinion of their integrity in the ministry, whilst providence continued them in it, be attended with the most comfortable reflections of their own minds, and secure the approbation of God and man. But if men dismiss themselves from the ministry they have undertaken, through feigned or trivial causes, or merely for the sake of secular advantages, and behave with indecency, and without any regard to their former stations and characters; the world will make the proper reflections on such a conduct, and they must be left to the feelings of their own minds, and the future impartial judgment of God. But such examples as these, my brethren, should be so far from moving us, or rendring us uneasy in our ministry, that they should confirm our resolutions of abiding in it, whilst God continues the ability of doing it. A consistent character is always an honourable one, if founded in usefulness and virtue; and let who will count the preaching of the cross foolishness, yet if God makes us the instruments of his power and grace, in bringing men to the knowledge and obedience of his Son, it will prove the wisdom of our resolution, it will be doing us the highest honour, and secure us finally that commendation of *good and faithful servants,*
from

from the great Lord and Governor of the christian church, that will abundantly recompence us for the contempt and censures we may undergo, for our fidelity to our trust, and repay with the richest advantages our perseverance in the labour and work of the Lord. However let me add :

III. That as preachers of the doctrine of the cross, we should be extremely careful to avoid every thing, that may expose our ministry to contempt, and the doctrine we preach to the deserved charge of foolishness. If indeed men will be offended, because we preach what we apprehend to be the necessary and peculiar doctrines of christianity, in this I think we should not gratify them, nor omit to insist on these things, with moderation and prudence, merely to escape their censures and reproach on this account. *Christ the wisdom and power of God*, should be the motto of a christian pastor, the sentiment of his heart, and the governing subject of his preaching. But if we preach ourselves, our own speculations, our philosophical subtleties, or our secular interests; if leaving the plain practical doctrines of Christ, we preach unintelligible, abstruse, mysterious points; especially if we preach them with a dogmatical positiveness and assurance, or with a censorious, bitter spirit; if we press any particular party-explication of them, as necessary to communion and salvation, and thereby create disturbances and schisms in the church, and spread a spirit of

contention and strife amongst the members of it; if we enter into political debates, and the low spirit of faction; if we preach up our own divine prerogatives and powers, our authority over the flock, our being lords of the heritage; if we preach up pomp and ceremony, instead of pure and spiritual religion; or if in preaching the truth, we make use of unintelligible terms, quaint phrases, swelling words, false rhetorick, odd gestures, ridiculous actions, violent agitations, distortions of face, and the like unnatural peculiarities; or if we condescend to low expressions, vulgar and mean comparisons, forced and unnatural similitudes, or spin natural ones into indecent lengths and applications; if we abuse and pervert scripture, fetch doctrines from texts that God never put into them, and endeavour to prove points by strained and tortured applications of scripture, or by forced and unnatural criticisms; these and the like methods will expose us to contempt, and justly fix on us the charge of the foolishness of preaching. A wise and prudent preacher will guard against all these occasions of censure, and by a diligent conscientious study of the scriptures labour to understand the mind of God; and not forget to apply himself daily at the throne of grace, to the God of truth, that he may be endowed with that wisdom which is necessary to save himself, and those that hear him. Lastly,

IV. We may infer, the certain validity and acceptableness of our ministry, if God by
our

our preaching brings you, who hear us, to the belief and obedience of the Gospel, and thereby prepares you for final Salvation. For what is a valid ministry, but such a ministry as answers its end, as God owns, and our people find effectual to convert, comfort, and establish them? Let me but be able to say of those, to whom I stately or occasionally preach; that I have been the instrument of the divine power and grace to reconcile them to God, and persuade them to present themselves to him an holy living and acceptable sacrifice; and I shall never question whether God approves me as a minister; but fully conclude, that however insufficient I am in myself for such a work, yet that I have received a real sufficiency from God. To you therefore, christians, let me address myself, as the conclusion of the whole. Give us the proofs that we are both sent and accepted of God. I ask for my brethren and myself no esteem from you, but what is due to our office and character; no, nor that, any longer than we maintain the real dignity of both. The esteem I would wish for myself and them, is that which arises from our usefulness to serve you in your best interests, and being the happy means of providence to convert you to knowledge, faith, holiness, virtue, benevolence, peace and charity. As we see these things abounding in you, we trust in God we shall never faint in our work. We can, we trust, appeal to you, it is not yours, but you that

that we seek. It is your salvation for which we are solicitous. What we beseech and earnestly intreat you to is: *Be ye reconciled unto God.* Save yourselves from this untoward Generation. Be strong in faith, and firm in your christian principles. Be exemplary in your conduct, and persevere unmoved in that holiness, without which none shall see God; and in that charity and goodness of disposition and behaviour, without which faith is of no avail. Then our preaching, and your hearing, will not be in vain. You will be thankful to God for our ministry, and be our joy, our glory and crown of rejoycing, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.

For that I have received a true testimony from God. To you therefore, Christians, let me address myself, as the consolation of the whole. Give us the proofs that we are both true and accepted of God. I ask for my brethren and myself no esteem from you, but what is due to our office and character; no, not that any longer than we maintain the real dignity of both. The esteem I would wish for myself and them, is that which arises from our ministerial to have you in your best interests, and being by means of providence to convert you to the true faith, holiness, and peace and charity. As we see little things abounding in you, we trust in God we shall never cease in our work. We can, we trust, appeal to you, it is not yours, but you